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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: TAIWAN'S POLITICAL SITUATION

¶1. Summary: Taiwan's major Chinese-language dailies continued to focus their coverage August 18 on former DPP Chairman Shih Ming-teh's efforts to oust President Chen Shui-bian, and investigations into the Presidential Office's special state affairs expense account. The pro-status quo "China Times" front-paged the results of its latest survey, which showed that the approval ratings for both President Chen Shui-bian and the DPP fell to new lows of 18 percent. The newspaper also ran a banner headline on page three that read "54 Percent of People Polled Want Bian to Step Down, a Historical New High."

¶2. In terms of editorials and commentaries, an editorial in the pro-independence "Liberty Times," Taiwan's biggest daily, criticized KMT Chairman Ma Ying-jeou and his pro-China, anti-Japan stance as he is about to complete his first year as the party chairman tomorrow. An editorial in the pro-unification "United Daily News," on the other hand, regarded former DPP Chairman Shih's campaign to oust Chen as a no-confidence vote on him. End summary.

A) "Ma Ying-jeou Shows His Real Face"

The pro-independence "Liberty Times" [circulation: 600,000] editorialized (8/18):

"... During the period when Lien Chan was the KMT chairman, both the ruling and opposition parties were engaged in irrational confrontations in the Legislative Yuan, which basically stalled the entire government's operations. After Ma Ying-jeou took the helm at the KMT, his practices did not match the rational, gentle image that he claimed to have created, and bills related to arms sales and appointments of Control Yuan members were boycotted [by the pan-Blue camp] as before. Pointless infighting and spinning remained the key notes of Blue-Green confrontations over the past year. What the outside is concerned with, in particular, are Ma's ethnic ideology and his positions on unification and independence. Ma seems to have shown his real face within just one year. Over this past year, Ma, who used to label himself as one of the 'new Taiwan people,' brought up the discourse about [Taiwan's] 'ultimate unification [with China]' without any hesitation, showing his 'pro-China and anti-Japan' tendency. ... In short, to put it bluntly, Ma's goal to run for the chairmanship of the KMT was to pave the way for his presidential campaign in 2008. As to whether Ma is capable of running a country, and whether he has the determination and courage to consolidate the Taiwan-centered values, his performance over the past year has provided sufficient material for the voters to examine [and decide]."

B) "A Million People Each Donating One Hundred New Taiwan Dollars Is A No-Confidence Referendum on President Chen"

"... This campaign [of collecting NT\$100 each from a million Taiwan

people] is not merely a warm-up for the movement to oust Bian; it is in the meantime a campaign for the Taiwan people to save themselves.

What the Taiwan public wants to save is the national machine that has been controlled by meritless politicians, and Taiwan's democracy, which has been eroded by a corrupt head of state. To put it more concretely, since the campaign of collecting NT\$100 from each person can reach out to the grass roots and thus has its universality, it can be viewed as the Taiwan people's alternative 'no-confidence vote' on President Chen Shui-bian. ... What's most important now is to transform the public's passion for donating money into energy for mass street rallies, and to get ready for any possible counterattack forces. It will be a tough battle to try to win back Taiwan's democracy from those rascal politicians."

YOUNG